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C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 000688

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2016

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SUBJECT: NORWEGIAN TRAFFICKING AND PROSTITUTION - RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

REF: OSLO 448

Classified By: ADCM Mike Hammer, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1.(C) Prostitution and trafficking in Norway continue to gain widespread attention in the Norwegian government and local media. The Norwegian Minister of Justice, Knut Storberget, will reportedly welcome a debate on criminalizing the solicitation of prostitutes, which remains legal in Norway. Local print media have run several stories focusing on foreign prostitutes and the public perception that the sex worker trade has dramatically increased. NGOs question whether the prostitution market is actually increasing, and point to racist elements in society precipitating the new prostitution debate. Experts agree that if Finland enacts legislation outlawing solicitation, Norway will definitely follow suit. End Summary.

Criminalizing Solicitation?

2.(U) As noted in reftel, the act of prostitution (and solicitation) is generally legal in Norway, with the exception of pimping and operating a brothel. As Finland and Estonia debate whether to criminalize solicitation, Justice Minister Storberget has agreed to review the issue publicly, stating that "it is not good if Norway becomes the only country in the neighborhood where buying sex is legal." The Minister has not entertained the possibility of criminalizing the act of prostitution itself.

3.(C) Prominent NGOs such as the Rosa Project and ProSenter debate assertions that trafficking and prostitution are on an upswing. Rosa assists trafficking victims (particularly through counseling and shelter opportunities). Alternatively, ProSenter is organized to assist prostitutes, providing counseling services while emphasizing health education. ProSenter Director Liv Jessen questions whether prostitution is increasing, commenting that "Prostitution is not absolutely out of control." In addition, Jessen cites statistics finding that all Nordic countries maintained a similar number of sex purveyors, estimated between 12-15 percent of the population. These individuals generally only solicit prostitutes once in their lives, and are not recurring "customers."

4.(C) Advocating that purchasing sex should not be criminalized, Jessen cites statistics which demonstrate,

under the current legal regime, that Norway has one of the lowest prostitution levels in Western Europe. She worries that the sex workers will face desperate conditions if solicitation (and the trade) becomes outlawed. Despite taking opposite sides as to criminalizing solicitation (and prostitution itself), both she and Unni Kiil of the Rosa Project find that criminalizing solicitation has been a common source of discussion for many years. Both also agree that if Finland outlaws solicitation, Norway would shortly follow with similar legislation.

#### Foreign Sex Workers and Suspected Trafficking Victims

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5.(C) Recently Norwegian media have focused on the criminalization of prostitution and the supposed influx of foreign prostitutes into Oslo. Newspapers claim that many of these women are suspected trafficking victims. The news daily Dagsavisen specifically notes that "pro-forma" marriages in Norway (particularly involving Vietnamese brides) is an increasing problem, with Norwegian men "buying" wives for up to 82,000 dollars.

6.(C) Foreign sex workers have pushed out traditional Norwegian-born prostitutes, offering sex services at lower prices. In particular, the number of Nigerian sex workers has increased dramatically. In 2003, there were 2 Nigerian sex workers identified in Norway. In 2005, that number increased to 500. Black female Norwegians feel distinct societal effects from the increase in Nigerian sex workers. Media reports note that black women feel uneasy about traveling in Oslo at night, as they are often unfairly lumped together with Nigerian prostitutes.

7.(C) Jessen believes that latent racism exists within the traditionally homogenous Norwegian society, and such racism is precipitating the current public debate on prostitution. According to Jessen, a recent poll suggests that 54 percent of the Norwegian population advocates criminalizing solicitation, while 52 percent would also criminalize the act of prostitution. Jessen does find that the issue of foreign prostitutes precipitates public discourse in diverse areas, including immigration, public nuisance and health problems (including HIV Aids).

#### Anti-trafficking efforts

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8.(C) A pimp, convicted of trafficking, is reported as having said that he chose Norway to traffick women because it "is easy to operate" here, as "prostitution is legal, people are willing to pay good money for the girls and the authorities are not paying much attention to it." Jessen and Kiil note that a certain level of frustration exists with respect to law enforcement authorities, and their handling of trafficking. For example, Jessen notes that Oslo police face political pressures from city district leaders to ensure that prostitution is maintained in only certain city areas. Citizens groups have advocated that prostitution be pushed away from the city center into Oslo's "fringe" areas (where prostitution has traditionally existed), out of the reach of areas largely populated by families. Apparently, city police are only authorized to monitor prostitution activities in specific areas of the city. According to Jessen, the Oslo city mayor told her that "the only people who cannot talk to the prostitutes are the police."

9.(C) Both Jessen and Kiil praise the anti-trafficking efforts of authorities in the central Norwegian city of Trondheim, while questioning the effectiveness of Oslo's anti-trafficking efforts. As Kiil noted, anti-trafficking cases require significant resources, while the outcomes are far from certain. Jessen found that Trondheim police make anti-trafficking a priority and are "dedicated" to combating this crime. Kiil, unable to comment on a major Trondheim trafficking case under investigation, is working closely with (and praises the efforts of) the Trondheim police. Kiil

noted her frustration with Oslo authorities, as "they don't want to speak with us" on certain cases-claiming she often did not hear back from the police once she passed on information about suspected trafficking crimes.

10.(C) Comment. Despite increasing media coverage and public concern, prostitution (and trafficking) do not appear to be on the rise in Norway. Experts agree that the overall number of sex trade workers remains constant, particularly given that "home grown" Norwegian prostitutes are leaving the business. Nigerians constitute the only clearly increasing number of foreign sex workers, with racial bias within the homogenous Norwegian society contributing to the current public focus on prostitution. Caucasian Eastern European sex workers are on the decline (with the exception of prostitutes from Romania and Bulgaria). Experts agree that criminalizing solicitation is a cyclical public debate and the current public outcry is nothing new. If Norway chooses to criminalize solicitation, it will likely occur because of "peer pressure" from Finland's likely new solicitation ban, rather than due to popular Norwegian sentiment. Based upon our discussions with trafficking experts, there also does not appear to be an overall increase in trafficking. We will continue to work closely with NGOs (particularly the relatively new Rosa Project) to monitor whether trafficking is indeed on the upswing. End Comment.

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